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Recent Survey Finds Over 73% US Expats Plan to Vote in Presidential Election, Though Only 7% Feel Their Interests are Fairly Represented by the US Government

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Annual survey conducted by Greenback Expat Tax Services

highlights impact US expats could

have on 2016 Presidential Election results as their dissatisfaction with US government grows

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With an estimated 8.7 million Americans living and working abroad, the US expat population continues to grow. Yet this group, who remain US citizens with Federal tax obligations, feels the US government commonly ignores their interests. Greenback Expat Tax Services sought to uncover the sentiments of this large group of US citizens living

abroad through its annual US Expat Opinion Survey, held from March to May 2016.

Greenback, along with its survey advisory board – made up of Expat Network, Where Americans Are Welcome, Expat Everyday Support Center, FAWCO and World of Expats – surveyed close to 1,800 US expats living and working abroad with various incomes and professions. The intent of the survey was to gather insights and opinions representative of US expats in an effort to advocate for the interests of all Americans living abroad.

Of the US expats who shared their thoughts, over 73% said they intend to vote in the 2016 Presidential Election. That is a total of nearly 6.4 million voters – yet they’ve gone unnoticed by most US politicians. In fact, only 7% of expats feel their interests are fairly represented by the US government. This isn’t new news – the opinions of US expats represented in this survey have been mirrored two years in a row. Additionally, 26% of those who said they don’t intend to vote this year cited the reason being their interests are not well represented. This number increased dramatically from last year, when only 8% of non-voters felt this way.

“US expats represent a significant number of the US population whose needs are widely ignored by our government,” said David McKeegan, Co-founder of Greenback Expat Tax Services. “While the focus of the upcoming election has been more about drama between Presidential candidates, this highly opinionated and underrepresented group of Americans living abroad has been continually disappointed with US politics and could heavily impact the outcome of the 2016 election.”

Additionally, the number of US expats who have chosen to renounce their citizenship increased 20% year-over-year in 2015. In fact, 64% of surveyed expats said they may choose to renounce their citizenship, and over one-third of those cite the burden of Federal tax obligations as the reason. Many of these expats say underrepresentation by the US government, along with tax filing costs and restrictions on investments are also large factors in their decision to renounce US citizenship.

“The results of Greenback’s annual survey indicate an overall trend of US expats being unhappy with how their interests are being represented within the US government, yet they are still required to pay taxes as though their needs are being taken care of,” stated Cora Lee Findley, Parliamentarian and Assistant Treasurer of FAWCO and 2016 US Expat Opinion Survey board member. “If a politician took the interests of all Americans, including US expats, into consideration, those living abroad may have more amicable feelings toward the US government and IRS and be less likely to view citizenship renunciation as the only option – and may swing the vote in the upcoming election.”

As more and more tax regulations seem to affect US expats, surprisingly, the number of US expats surveyed who are affected by the Foreign Account Tax Compliance Act (FATCA) decreased slightly from 2015, from 36% to 32%. The number of respondents who have had issues with their foreign bank since FATCA implementation decreased 1% from last year, to 12% – though FATCA still hasn’t been fully implemented worldwide.

“With the rise of the number of foreign bank accounts being closed for Americans living abroad, it was time to take action to help US expats,” said Anne Liebgott, founder of Where Americans Are Welcome and 2016 US Expat Opinion Survey board member. “Since expats face so many hurdles and have so little representation while living abroad, it was my goal to create a place where Americans abroad could find information on financial institutions who welcome them with open arms.”

“This year’s survey yet again reinforces the fact that renouncing citizenship is considered a very desirable option for many expats when faced with burdensome tax obligations, and only a small percentage of Americans abroad feel their interests are fairly represented by the US government,” said McKeegan. “This is a strong, opinionated group whose voice has a significant opportunity to be heard in the upcoming Presidential election – so government leaders should be taking the time to acknowledge and advocate for their needs and interests.”

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